



ELK GROVE COMMUNITY SERVICES DISTRICT

Fire ■ Emergency Medical Services ■ Parks & Recreation

FIRE DEPARTMENT

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FIRED UP FOR FITNESS

ELK GROVE FIREFIGHTERS LAUNCH A DEPARTMENT WEIGH-OFF PROGRAM

Elk Grove, CA – Like many Americans, Elk Grove firefighters have resolved to shed a few pounds in 2004. Helping them in their “battle of the bulge” is a contest started by local paramedics in an effort to promote improved health and fitness Department-wide.

Being fit is particularly critical for firefighters who rely on physical strength and mental agility to meet the demands of each 24 hour shift. According to the National Fire Protection Association, nearly 40 percent of the 97 U.S. firefighter deaths in 2002 were caused by heart attacks.

The New Year launches the Department’s second fitness contest. In 2003, the Department logged a collective loss of 227.6 pounds in just three months. Firefighter/Paramedic Eddie Raschein manages the contest for the Department.

“Most of our personnel are health conscious anyway. They have to be in order to perform the work they do. Like everyone though, we have enjoyed lots of good food over the holidays. The contest is a friendly motivator for all of us to re-commit to a healthy diet and exercise program,” explained Raschein.

In 1998, the Department launched a firefighter wellness program that equipped all Elk Grove fire stations with exercise equipment and guidance from UC Davis fitness experts. Time is allotted during each shift for fitness conditioning. Firefighters who committed to the wellness program completed a comprehensive medical examination. Currently, the Department-wide participation level for the program stands at 63 percent.

Community Services District officials back the wellness program and contests like the weigh-off for the potential cost savings they offer related to reduced worker related injuries.

“Clear cut evidence of whether the program is reducing injuries is hard to come by in light of increased call volumes, but generally the stronger our people are the less likely it

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is that they'll become injured on the job," says Fire Chief Keith Grueneberg. "That's good for the District and for our personnel."

In 2000, Raschein and five other firefighting personnel completed an in-house training program that prepared them to take the NSCA National Fitness Trainer Certification Examination. The Department was one of the first in the country to establish a peer fitness trainer program to assist personnel in their exercise program. Peer fitness trainers are a concept now endorsed and adopted by both the International Association of Fire Chiefs and the International Association of Firefighters.

As the Department kicks off their weight loss contest, Raschein hopes to motivate other Elk Grove residents to increase their daily exercise and commit to a heart healthy diet in the New Year. The Department does not advocate any specific weight loss program, however, local firefighters have worked closely with health professionals in the area to develop basic guidelines for safe weight loss. The following are some general tips offered by Fire Department fitness trainers:

- Commit to a consistent exercise program. Find activities that you enjoy doing that keep you moving for at least 20 minutes a day.
- Establish a diet of moderation. Food favorites can still be part of a diet that is balanced with other nutritious foods and smaller portions.
- Get plenty of rest. A good night's sleep reenergizes the body.

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